

Starting Early, Starting Strong

Manitoba's Early Childhood Development Framework

November 2013



Manitoba 

Investing early and wisely
in early childhood
to provide the best start
for all of our children
and the best future
for our province.

*Focused on
what matters most
to Manitobans.*



A Message from the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet

Working Together for Children

On behalf of the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet, it is my pleasure to introduce *Starting Early, Starting Strong*, Manitoba's early childhood development (ECD) framework. This framework affirms the government of Manitoba's commitment to ECD, recognizes the tremendous work that has been done to date, and identifies building blocks for future work. Supporting children and families is the cornerstone of a strong Manitoba, a Manitoba where all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Since the establishment of Healthy Child Manitoba in 2000, we have sought input from our community-based partners and stakeholders, and our Provincial Healthy Child Advisory Committee, using their wisdom to develop and shape our efforts in ECD. This community participation was magnified with the recent *Starting Early, Starting Strong* public dialogues, through which we invited all Manitobans to share their knowledge on how to improve support for children and families through early childhood investments. We have heard from thousands of Manitobans, including parents, grandparents, service providers, community leaders, aboriginal elders, social justice advocates, business owners, and economic developers. The major themes emerging from the dialogues have been incorporated into this framework, along with counsel from leading experts and researchers in the field of child development, economics, and social enterprise. The over-riding message we have heard is clear: A strong start in the early years provides all of our youngest citizens with the best and fairest chance to reach their fullest potential; their success is the key to a prosperous future for our province.

For more than a decade, the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet has steered the work of multiple government departments, in partnership with our many community-based partners and stakeholders (e.g. the early learning and child care community, local service organizations, parent child coalitions, school divisions, regional health authorities, aboriginal partners, child welfare authorities, business leaders, and economic developers) to support young children, their parents and their families. These partnerships are the key to our success. By working together we have maximized our resources and synergized our efforts towards supporting the best possible start for Manitoba's children. Much work has been done and much progress has been made. However, as Chair of the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet I can assure you that we are very aware that there is still much to be done. This Framework reflects the priorities of Manitobans and provides a structure for our continued work together. I look forward to working with our partners on the opportunities and challenges ahead. I would like to extend my sincerest appreciation to those of you who have made it your duty to support children and families, to advocate on behalf of Manitoba's children, and to raise public awareness of ECD. Let me assure you that your important contribution has built a strong foundation upon which we can further our progress and increase our efforts in early childhood development. Thank you.

Minister Chief
Chair of the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet

“Investments in the health and early development of young children and babies are among the most important a society can make. Conclusive evidence from scientific and economic research reflects the lessons of traditional Aboriginal teachings in pointing to the life-changing value of investments in early childhood development: positive health outcomes, social development, and school readiness for the long-term well being and success of children.”

Throne Speech, 2013

Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet



Greg Selinger
Premier of Manitoba



Kevin Chief
Children and Youth
Opportunities (Chair)



Eric Robinson
Aboriginal and
Northern Affairs



James Allum
Education and
Advanced Learning



Kerri Irvin-Ross
Family Services/
Status of Women



Erin Selby
Health



Sharon Blady
Healthy Living
and Seniors



Peter Bjornson
Housing and
Community
Development



Theresa Oswald
Jobs and the
Economy



Andrew Swan
Justice



Erna Braun
Labour and
Immigration

Key Recommendations from Manitoba's Provincial Healthy Child Advisory Committee

1. Strengthen universal access to quality early learning opportunities
2. Raise the level of public understanding on the value of ECD
3. Address jurisdictional barriers and the social determinants of health
4. Support inter-sectoral collaboration and integrated services

“Early childhood development is the work of many. Healthy Child Manitoba’s cross-department and multi-sector approach maximizes our efforts in supporting children and families and allows us to do more of what works.”

Kevin Chief, Chair of the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet

Putting Children First

The science of ECD shows us the significant impact that environment and early life experiences have upon young children's development, determining their future health, social and emotional well-being, and success at learning. All children are born with great potential, yet, sadly, many do not have the benefit of receiving the positive early supports, experiences and opportunities they need to thrive. Consequently, their development falls behind and they face a learning gap once they begin school – a gap that is very difficult to overcome. This gap exists for far too many of Manitoba's children, especially those from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Research shows that Aboriginal children in Manitoba are especially vulnerable in their early years and are at greater risk of being ill-prepared for kindergarten. There is no question about the tremendous potential of Aboriginal children. However, unacceptable barriers such as poverty, discrimination and unequal opportunity impact unfairly upon this potential.

It doesn't have to be this way. There is global consensus that healthy starts, nurturing relationships, and supportive environments in early childhood can close the equity gap within a generation (World Health Organization, 2008). That is why it is so important to recognize that supporting children and their healthy development is not simply a private family responsibility, it is the shared social responsibility of all Manitobans. When governments, communities and businesses work together for children, we assure them the fairest opportunities to reach their fullest potential.



“The first step in addressing the educational inequities of Manitoba's Aboriginal children is to acknowledge that this is a Manitoba issue, not just an Aboriginal issue.”

James Wilson, Chair of the
Provincial Healthy Child Advisory Committee

The Science and Wisdom of ECD: Building our Framework on Trusted Knowledge

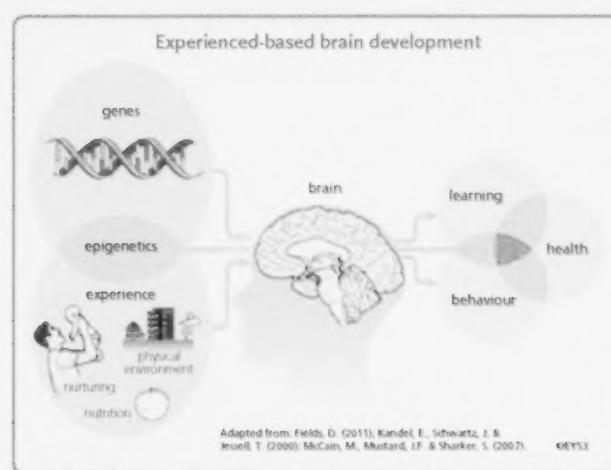
Not only is our shared social responsibility to supporting all young children the right thing to do, it is also the wise thing to do. Our youngest citizens will become tomorrow's leaders, innovators, entrepreneurs, and skilled work force. If we do not develop the talents and competencies of every child, we compound the social costs of inequity with the economic costs of missed opportunity. Social justice advocates, child research experts, business leaders and economic developers agree: the future prosperity of Manitoba is tied to our ability to nurture the health, learning and well-being of our young children. The science behind this understanding is irrefutable.

Decades of research into epigenetics and the science of ECD, shows us that early-life experiences shape how the developing brain gets wired. Experiences in children's early years (pre-natal to age five) build the architecture of the developing brain. Positive early-life experiences (e.g. nurturing relationships, stable housing, safe neighbourhoods, supportive communities, financial security) build strong and healthy brains, which then lead to strong and healthy futures: success at school,

good physical health and mental health, gainful employment, and responsible citizenship.

Unfortunately, the converse is also true. Negative early life experiences are toxic stressors on the developing brain, weakening the architecture at its foundation. Toxic stressors in early childhood (e.g. unsafe neighbourhoods, poor nutrition, social exclusion, racism, family or community violence, harsh parenting, neglect, abuse, and the conditions of poverty) often lead to unhealthy futures: poor health, mental illness, failure at school, unemployment, addictions, and unprepared parenthood.

Sadly, these negative early life experiences and negative outcomes often repeat themselves in future generations of families caught in these cycles. But these negative cycles can be broken – decades of research prove it. The science of ECD reinforces the wisdom of our elders, about how history has affected our children, and how we can change their lives for the better for generations to come. It is upon this trusted knowledge that we have developed our efforts in ECD.



Epigenetics and the Science of ECD

As shown in the diagram, the intersection of genes and experience is known as the science of epigenetics. View the following videos to learn more about this powerful knowledge: http://developingchild.harvard.edu/topics/science_of_early_childhood/#

Guiding Principles and Values

The following guiding principles and values reflect the important input and wisdom of our many community-based partners and stakeholders, the Provincial Healthy Child Advisory Committee, and the many Manitobans who shared their knowledge or participated in the *Starting Early, Starting Strong* provincial dialogue. These principles and values will guide our work as we further our efforts in ECD.

Efforts in ECD will be:

- **Community-based:** recognize local capacity and value community diversity and indigenous knowledge. Decision-making, service delivery, and evaluation will be done in collaboration with community-based partners, stakeholders and service organizations.
- **Evidence-based:** reflect proven and promising evidence that encompasses quality, play-based and developmentally appropriate standards. Evidence will range from the wisdom of elders to leading-edge science.
- **Culturally-based:** value, honour, and promote culture and language as integral components of programs, supports and services.
- **Responsive and Inclusive:** respond to the differing needs of families through an appropriate mix of universal and targeted approaches and inclusive and accessible models that recognize and address the needs of vulnerable populations.
- **Integrated, Co-ordinated and Comprehensive:** integrate and co-ordinate across sectors and communities to maximize efficiencies within the service system, bring together the best from each system, and complement federal, aboriginal, municipal and community initiatives.
- **Partnership-driven:** maximize outcomes through government-community-business partnerships. To the greatest degree possible, these partnerships will be collaborative, co-operative and consensus-driven.
- **Measurable:** continually measure and monitor programs and services to ensure they are achieving meaningful outcomes, targets, and indicators of success.
- **Fiscally-sound:** demonstrate sound potential for favourable returns on investment. On-going cost-benefit analyses of early childhood investments will be done to ensure continuous fiscal responsibility.
- **Sustainable:** produce solid results and favourable returns on investment sustained with a long-term funding and capacity building approach.
- **Accountable:** investments and outcomes will be regularly and publicly reported to Manitobans.



Progress to Date

The many ECD programs and initiatives delivered under Healthy Child Manitoba's cross-departmental and multi-sectoral strategy were implemented because of their strong evidence base and their demonstrated worth as fiscally-sound investments. Some examples include **Family Choices Early Learning and Child Care plan**, **Maternal and Child Health action plan**, the **Early Childhood Development Initiative**, the creation of the **Early Childhood Education Unit**, the **Healthy Baby pre-natal benefit and community support program**, the **Families First screening and home-visiting program**, the **Triple P positive parenting program**, **Roots of Empathy**, **Seeds of Empathy**, and **Parent Child Coalitions**. These successful initiatives provide a strong foundation upon which to further our work. In these times of fiscal constraint, maximizing the returns of our ECD investments through community-business-government partnerships and strategic innovation opportunities is paramount. Manitoba has a wealth of expertise and knowledge to advance our progress. The following areas – our ECD building blocks – reflect our priority focus for continued ECD work: 1. promoting healthy starts; 2. supporting strong and nurturing families; 3. fostering safe, secure and supportive environments; and 4. strengthening communities.

“I can't think of an investment that would provide a greater return than one at the stage of a child's life in which their life-long capacity, both intellectual and emotional, is so defined. The employer community must recognize that by supporting early childhood development, they are in fact supporting their future workforce.”

Dave Angus, President and CEO,
the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce

The ECD Building Blocks

1. Promoting Healthy Starts

A healthy start in life literally shapes the early development of a child's brain and sets the course for the future health, well-being and learning. That is why Manitoba is committed to sustainable investments in universal supports such as pre-natal nutrition and community support for pregnant women, FASD prevention, obstetrician access, midwifery development, and birth centres. Further efforts that support healthy starts for newborns and babies include public health services; parenting preparation and education; breastfeeding promotion; maternal mental health and well-being supports, and early intervention screening.

2. Supporting Strong and Nurturing Families

Strong and nurturing families have an integral role in supporting the development of children. Positive parenting, secure attachment, and attentive and loving care-giving are essential for healthy development. A child's brain is activated by these early nurturing relationships, and becomes wired for lifelong learning. Moms, dads, caregivers, and extended family members are children's first – and best – teachers. Yet all families can benefit from extra support to help them raise their children within strong and nurturing families. That is why Manitoba is committed to sustainable investments in services and supports that respond to the differing needs of families through an appropriate mix of universal and targeted approaches (e.g. positive parenting supports and educational resources; quality early learning and child care; family visiting programs; family violence prevention; kinship and foster parent support; addictions prevention and support programs; services that support and honour cultural and social inclusivity; and services for children with additional support needs).

3. Fostering Safe, Secure and Supportive Environments

Four decades of research shows us that toxic stressors in early life are damaging to brain development and hinder the potential of children. Children need safe, secure and supportive environments in order to grow and thrive, yet not all families have the same opportunities or abilities to provide their children with these positive early life environments. There is much we can do to foster safe, secure and supportive environments so that all children have the fairest chance to reach their full potential. That is why Manitoba is committed to sustainable investments including the next five-year action plan for early learning and child care; integrated community-school partnerships; family resource centres; equitable recreation opportunities for low-income families; poverty reduction and social inclusion; food security; and safe and stable housing.

“Success at school begins long before school entry. Superintendents, trustees and principals have embraced this knowledge and are opening the doors of their schools to parents, grandparents and preschoolers to set the stage for a positive school experience for every child.”

Carolyn Duhamel, Executive Director,
Manitoba School Boards Association



4. Strengthening Communities

Supportive and sustainable communities are essential to promoting healthy starts, supporting strong and nurturing families, and fostering safe and secure homes for Manitoba's children. Put simply, “it takes a village to raise a child”, and the science of early childhood development shows us the truth behind this wise proverb. That is why Manitoba is committed to sustainable investments in community capacity building and training, partnership development, public education, and knowledge sharing. Further efforts include healthy schools; parent child coalitions; safety and infrastructure; crime prevention; and community development partnerships with local, federal and aboriginal stakeholders.

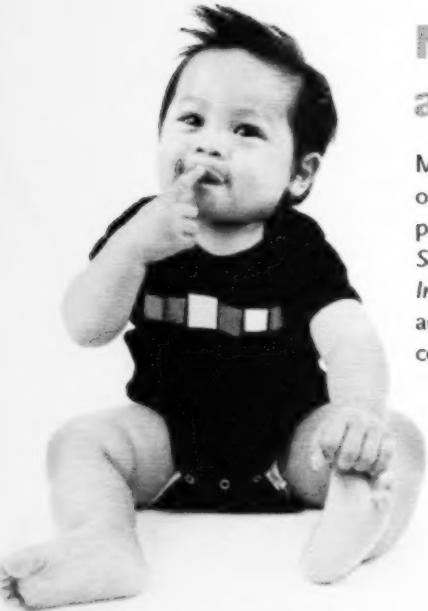
Integrating and Co-ordinating Our Work

As outlined in the diagram below, our continued efforts in ECD align with and complement other work by the Government of Manitoba. This co-ordinated, partnership-driven approach to cross-departmental and multi-sectoral work maximizes our impact towards supporting the best possible starts for Manitoba's children. The graphic below illustrates how our ECD efforts align with several other provincial strategies and investments.



Measuring for Success and Reporting Our Progress

Manitoba has a renowned system for evaluating and monitoring the effectiveness of our early childhood work. Two sets of province-wide indicator data serve as key "check points" to show us how our children are doing at birth (gathered from the *Families First Screen*) and as they start school in kindergarten (gathered from the *Early Development Instrument*). On-going consultation with the Provincial Healthy Child Advisory Committee and other community-based partners and stakeholders ensures our continued commitment to ECD, and regular public reporting provides updates on our progress.



“I look forward to contributing to the progress on ECD with the outcomes from the current consultations on Early Learning and Child Care. The response to date has been enthusiastic and informative. It is gratifying to see the compassion and commitment that our youngest citizens inspire.”

Kerri Irvin-Ross, Minister of Family Services and Past Chair of HCCC

Moving Forward

Our evaluation work so far tells us that we are on the right course. Since the establishment of Healthy Child Manitoba in 2000, we have made significant gains in improving the health, well-being and development of our children. While recognizing this important progress, we know there is more to be done, but this work cannot be the work of government alone. A "working together" philosophy underpins our approach and the success of our continued efforts depends on the co-operation, collaboration, and contribution of all Manitobans. Together we can do it. We are a province that puts children first.

For more information on Healthy Child Manitoba and the continuum of evidence-based ECD programs and services that support children and families please visit:
www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/about/index.html



